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ABSTRACT

Careers of women in educational administration differ from those of their male counterparts. Women encounter career barriers in educational organizations. This paper presents case studies of three female principals, two from California and one from Pennsylvania. The first case describes a woman whose tenure was ended with a negotiated reassignment to a lower-level administrative position. The next case describes a woman who received an unsatisfactory rating as a principal that resulted in a demotion to assistant principal. However, through her attorney various options were negotiated. The last case involves a woman who was demoted to teacher upon returning from a sabbatical leave to obtain her doctorate. This case involved a successful sex discrimination suit by the woman. The cases are presented from the subject's perspective with data gathered through open-ended interviews. The external conditions, the subject's behavior, the political environment of the school districts, and other relevant factors are analyzed. (11 references) (SI)

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FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE INVOLUNTARY REASSIGNMENT OF THREE WOMEN PRINCIPALS

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Introduction

Recent studies have shown that the careers of women in educational administration differ from those of their male counterparts (Carlson & Schmuck, 1981; Gaertner, 1981; Gross & Trask, 1976; Meskin, 1974; Ortiz, 1982; Paddock, 1981; Stockard, 1984). Despite the abundance of women within the teacher ranks, administrative positions are dominated by men. Prior to moving into an administrative role, the typical female spends more years as a teacher. The initial administrative role is likely to be a staff position with instructional services responsibilities as opposed to a position with line authority and responsibility. If and when a women becomes a principal, it is most likely to be at the elementary level, and that will be the highest rank she will achieve (Gaertner, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1987). It has also been found that if a competent individual is to be excluded from the administrative ranks, that individual is more likely to be a female (Hagen and Kahn, 1975).

Much has been written about the career barriers that women are likely to encounter in educational organizations (Carlson & Schmuck, 1981; Edson, 1981; Gaertner, 1981; Paddock, 1981; Schmuck, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1987). Most of these, however, refer to barriers to initial appointment to an administrative position or to advancement to a higher level position within the educational organization. Little has been written concerning barriers to success within a position. Carlson and Schmuck (1981) discuss structural contingencies relative to career barriers, contingencies

over which the individual aspirant has no control. One of these barriers is identified as "...assessment, either subjective or objective, of an individual's perfomance in office" (Carlson and Schmuck, 1981,in Schmuck, Charters, & Carlson [Eds.] p. 124). An individual who does not perform up to standard is held back. One problem with assessment techniques is pointed out by Shakeshaft (1987). She has found that women administrators do not get corrective feedback as often as men.

This paper presents case studies of three female principals, two from California and one from Pennsylvania. The first case describes a woman whose tenure was ended with a negotiated reassignment to a lower level administrative position. The next case describes a woman who received an unsatisfactory rating as a principal which resulted in a demotion to assistant principal. However, through her attorney various options were negotiated. The last case involves a woman who was demoted to teacher upon returning from a sabbatical leave to obtain her doctorate. This case involved a successful sex discrimination suit by the woman. The cases are presented from the subject's perspective with data gathered through open-ended interviews. The initial questions were designed to gather background information relative to the subject's training, educational background, career, and socialization for an administrative position. The stage was then set for more general questions which allowed her to describe her assessment of her performance as a principal, the process utilized by the superintendent and the board of education to assess her performance, and the events which led up to her reassignment.The

interviews were audio taped and ranged in length from two to seven hours.

The subjects were identified through personal and professional contacts and were assured of anonymity. A fictitious name was created for each woman to use in this paper. The subjects willingly participated in the research hoping to help other women in educational administration.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the external conditions, the subject's behavior, the political environment of the school districts, and any other relevant factors which might have contributed to the women's removal from their principalships with the hope of utilizing the findings to improve school administration training programs for women.

A summary of Sheila Reynold's Story

Even for a woman, Sheila had an unusually long teaching career before acquiring her first administrative position. She spent twelve years as an elementary teacher and an additional ten years teaching junior high English. She began her administrative career as a girl's vice principal and became an assistant principal for curriculum and instruction in the newly developed intermediate school. Her first principalship came nine years later, but not until she had been passed over once when a woman from outside the school district was selected as the first female principal.

The school district in which she worked was a large urban district organized to support a decentralized system of management. All 29 principals reported directly to the superintendent who allowed extensive autonomy to the principals. Although academic achievement was emphasized, there was little in the way of standardized curriculum in the school district and no mechanism for principal accountability regarding instructional supervision. The system for evaluation of principals consisted of the principal developing five written goals for the year, determining a means to assess achievement of the goals, and presenting evidence to the superintendent in a personal conference at the end of the school year.

Sheila's first principalship assignment was at a very large elementary school located in a low socio-economic area of the school district. Most of the students were non-English speakers. The staff was experienced and resistant to changes associated with the demands of bilingual education programs. The physical plant was in poor condition and the clerical staff was fueding and ineffective. The assistant principal was passively resistant and resentful of being passed over for the principalship.

Mrs. Reynolds tackled the plant and clerical problems first. She approached the superintendent and other district office staff for help and resources, a tactic which was later to be interpreted as a lack of resourcefulness on her part. Her frequent contacts with the superintendent were interpreted by him as her inablility to prioritize and resolve problems independently. To add to her image

problems, she had fallen into a habit of being late to meetings due to her excessive problems at the school. Teachers were resiting her attempts at improving articulation and instruction. They complained to the superintendent about Sheila's poor communication skills. At the end of her fourth year, the superintendent suggested she consider looking for another school district. Sheila interpreted this as pressure to retire early. She resisted.

The next year she was transfered to a small upper-middle class school. The first semester went well. Mrs. Townsend had decided to limit her contacts with the superintendent. Teachers seemed content. Parents were supportive. Her troubles began when she made a decision to make changes in the gifted program. The plan was proposed to Sheila by the district consultant for the gifted with little or no participation by the school staff. Another troublesome area developed when School Improvement funding fo the school was dramatically reduced threatening the possible loss of the only resource teacher position at the school That teacher, who had previously been supportive of Mrs. Townsend, was not satisfid with Sheila's efforts to save the postion despite her success. The resource teacher who was politically influencial in the coummunity withdrew her suppoirt for Sheila and organized teachers' efforts to oppose Sheila's continuing as principal. Some parents were also included in this effort having been dissatisfied with some problems resulting from some poor scheduling done by the principal.

Again communication was cited by teachers as a problem area for Sheila. She attended workshops that summer to address the problem

and attempted to implement new techniques in the first semenster of her second year, but the teacher dissatisfaction had escalated to such a point that the superintendent advised Sheila that she would be removed from the principalshipp after the winter vacation.

At this point Sheila's major concern was to protect her future retirement income. She negotiated a reassignment to the district art consultant postion, a curricular area of interest to her throughout the years. In addition, she promised to retire within two years. She conducted these negotiations herself with no legal counsel or advice, although she had sought and been denied assistance from the state professional organization for administrators. This independent style void of the advice of a mentor or supportive colleague was reflective of the overall approach utilized by Sheila during her principalships.

Sheila Townsend served in the special art consultant role for two years before retiring from the district, but has continued her career as a private consultant and publisher of instructional materials.

Conclusions Regarding Sheila Reynolds

Sheila Reynolds' career fit the pattern of many women in educational administration. She spent thirty years as a classroom teacher and as an assistant principal before being named a principal. She had not interfaced with other administrators much over that lengthy instructional career, and she had no sponsor or mentor. This fact contributed to several of her problems: delayed entry into a principalship; a lack of information about the selection process for principals; alack of information about the structure and operation of the school district; a lack of information about the superintendent's expectations of principals; the unavailability of seasoned advice and reflection when she encountered problems as a principal; the sense of isolation which accompanies the position of principal was exaggerated; and no assistance was available to make the transition into the principal ranks.

Mrs. Reynolds did not think that the superintendent gave her specific feedback concerning her performance and need for improvement. In analyzing one memo to her from him, it could be described as very specific in content as to what he wanted her to do. However, she was looking for specificity in process, technique, or strategy. Therefore she perceived the feedback to be only general in nature and not very helpful. Lacking a supportive mentor or network of fellow administrators, Mrs. Reynolds had no source for consultation to assist her in translating the superintendent's specific content suggestions into specific

corrective actions.

Furhtermore, Sheila's reaction to the superintendent as her evaluator served as a barrier to any corrective behavior on her part. She thought it ironic and somewhat unfair that she was being judged to have poor people skills by a man who she felt also lacked such skills. This sense of unfairness seemed to immobilize her from seeking help or advice as to how to deal with him and the situation.

Sheila did not realize the politics of the situation. She believed that because she was working toward goals that were good for children, that over time she would prevail. The fact that teachers continued to complain about her leadership was a problem to the superintendent. His eventual method of resolving the problem was to remove her.

Borrowing terms from Catherine Marshall's (1979) dissertation on the career socialization of women, one could conclude that Sheila Reynolds failed to make the transition from a culturally defined woman to a self-defined role as a female school administrator. She clung to the notion that she would prevail if she continued to do things which were good for the children. She entered the principalship at a time when there were concerns in the school district about the lack of female principals. Unfortunately for Mrs. Reynolds, she had not completed the socialization process that Marshall describes as so important to role confidence and satisfaction resulting from successful transition into a male

dominated profession. Mrs. Reynolds lacked the supportive network and advice associated with a mentor relationship. She was not successful in identifying and capitalizing on substitutions for her lack of socialization.

A Summary of Maria Stagno's Story

Maria Stagno began her teaching career in Catholic schools in a Western Pennsylvania metropolitan area. Her first job in the public schools came five years later when she spent six years as a reading specialist at the junior high school level. This was followed by three years as a reading/langauge arts consultant for Macmillan Publishing Company. Her first administrative position came in a suburban district coordinating staff and program development. From here she worked her way up the administrative ladder first serving for four years as a middle school assistant principal before being appointed an elementary principal, the only female principal in the district.

At the time of her appointment, the superintendent told her that although the elementary supervisor and the assistant superintendent of personnel did not favor her appointment, he had overruled their objections. She should remember that she owed her job to "Uncle Joe," referring to himself. Maria had no idea why the personnel man opposed her appointment, but she speculated that the elementary supervisor, with whom she had worked when they were both coordinators, did not like Maria personally. Mrs. C., the elementary supervisor had moved into that position as Maria became

an assistant principal. At that time the elementary supervisor did not supervise principals. However, that responsibility had been added to Mrs. C's job despite the fact that she had never served as a principal, and indeed was not even certified as a principal. Maria believes that Mrs. C has difficulty working with women.

Maria had enjoyed favorable ratings in her administrative posts up until her second year as a principal. The school district in which Maria worked had a very elaborate evaluation system for administrative personnel with ratings in the following categories: fair, competent, commendable, distinguished, exceptional. Advancement on the salary schedule is linked to the performance rating and a maximum rating of only "competent" can be achieved the first year in a position. If a principal expects to receive any rating above commendable, s/he must take on added district responsibilities beyond those associated with the principalship. In her administrative positions prior to becoming a principal, Maria had received 7 "commendable" ratings and 1 "distinguished" rating. She was promoted to principal mid-year and received the maximum allowable rating of "competent". In her first full year as a principal she received a "commendable" rating.

Having followed a woman principal who had served the school for 15 years but had a reputation for poor community communication, Maria decided this and staff morale should be her priorities for the school. Her area of specialization for her doctorate was community relations so she felt comfortable with that aspect of the job. The superintendent never articulated to her his goals for school.

Her troubles began with the mid-year evaluation her second full year as a principal. As supervisor of elementary principals, Mrs. C met with each principal monthly and formally prepared a mid-year and annual evaluation. There had been no indication of her dissatisfaction with Maria's performance until February when she presented Maria with a 6 page documentation of her shortcomings. The State Department of Education advised Maria that the district was obligated to provide her a plan. Mrs. C refused and suggested Maria should do it herself. Eventually in April Mrs. C produced a plan which then required improvement to be demonstrated by May for the annual evaluation. Two specific requirements were that Maria document all of her decisions, reporting them bimonthly, and to exhibit team work within the management team. The annual evaluation determined there had not been improvement overall, and a rating of "fair - unsatisfactory" was given. Maria was told she would be demoted to an intermediate assistant principal.

This unsatisfactory rating had grave consequences as the state required three years of satisfactory ratings for certification to become permanent. It was primarily for this reason that Maria had sought legal counsel. Up until this point she had not shared any of her difficulties with anyone, except a very close personal friend who was not an educator. Having never had a mentor and feeling excluded by the nine male principals in the school district, she had not identified a support system. She felt she had not been allowed to be a team member. She was feeling very alone.

In the meantime, Maria had developed and administered a staff and community survey to assess her performance. The overall rating given her by her staff on a 1-5 point scale was 4.65; the comparable parent rating was 4.42. Maria's opinion was that her staff and community were unaware of the district's dissatisfaction with her performance, and that they did not share it.. At the luncheon on the last day of school when she shared with her staff what was happening they expressed shock. They had not expected her to return the following year because she had been approved for a sabbatical before the mid year evaluation. But they had no idea the superintendent was attempting to demote her.

As the summer vacation began, Maria prepared for her sabbatical during which she was to complete coursework and the internship for her school psychologist certificate. Even before the conflict on the job, she was considering a change in career, possibly going into private practice as a school psychologist. The sabbatical conveniently gave her some time to negotiate with the district and to consider career options.

Her attorney prepared a proposal to the superintendent. It specified that the rating of "fair - unsatisfactory" be change to "competent", removing the unsatisfactory which would block permanent certification. Maria agreed to the transfer to assistant principal upon return from sabbatical and waived her right to a hearing. It was agreed that if Maria sought other employment during her sabbatical, a neutral letter of recommendation would be

issued by the school district. If she were successful at acquiring other employment, the school district would relieve her of any payback obligations. Although the superintendent initailly demanded that Maria waive her right to return after her sabbatical, the agreement as proposed by her attorney was accepted by the school district.

Within the next year while on sabbatical, Maria competed successfully for an assistant superintendency in a neighboring school district. She began that assignment in July, 1989, one year following her involuntary removal from her principalship.

Conclusions Regarding Maria Stagno

In reflecting on the situation, Maria attributes most of what happened to the poor personal relationship Mrs. C had with all the principals, not just her. According to Maria, all the men couldn't stand her, but they never questioned her in public. Maria did. Describing herself as passive and unquestioning in the early years of her career, Maria now viewed herself as less tolerant and less accepting. She frequently questioned or spoke out about educational policies. Her honesty was sometimes not welcome. Also, she set standards for herself which some of the men interpreted as being overly agressive and competitive. They occasionally accused her of "kissing someone's ass" when she implemented innovative projects at her school. This she felt was the basis for Mrs. C's charge that she wasn't a team player. This behavior might have been interpreted differently had she been a

man.

Maria also attributed some of her troubles to a double standard for her and the men principals. Principals were required to prepare written monthly reports to Mrs. C. Some of the male principals ignored the requirement all together; none of them provided detailed reports. Maria had computerized hers and attempted to do a thorough job. In retrospect she thinks she provided Mrs. C with too much information, information that was eventually slanted to use against her. Another example of a double standard related to meeting attendance. In the two and a half years that Maria was a principal, she was 15 minutes late to one meeting. Men frequently were late, left to smoke cigarettes during the meeting never to return to the meeting, and yet they were not written up like Maria was for her one incidence of tardiness.

Again the lack of a mentor or support system for Maria could have been a significant factor in her case. She faced this problem alone, having no assistance from her professional colleagues to interpret what the district expectations were. Her colleagues looked at her as a threat. The behaviors they attributed to her if they had been exhibited by a man would likely have been accepted as ambitious, assertive, and innovative, a situation cited throughout the literature (Marshall, 1979; Shakeshaft, 1987; Carlson & Schmuck, 1981).

A Summary of Rebecca Tull's Story

Rebecca Tull spent eight years as a classroom teacher before applying for an elementary assistant principalship at the suggestion of her male principal. It seems that there were no women among the 37 applicants so the superintendent had encouraged Rebecca's principal to urge her to apply. During the four years that she served as an elementary assistant principal, Rebecca had rich experiences at two different schools, one of which was one of the first schools to receive state compensatory education funds.

The school district in which Rebecca worked was a large urban school district in Southern California experiencing a high level of conflict. Racial tensions were high as the district was sued for failure to integrate the schools. One particularly troublesome school was the one where Rebecca had spent her teaching career. In 1967 when that mostly African American school community demanded a new and more sympathetic principal, their request was for Rebecca. Although white, Rebecca had enjoyed a good working relationship with the community in her years as a teacher. It was under these conditions that she became the principal of an elementary school with over 1200 students located in the heart of the ghetto.

In the meantime, the legal struggle over desegregation continued. In 1970 when the district was ordered by the courts to desegregate, Rebecca was among those asked by the superintendent to serve on a team which would draft the district's desegregation plan for the court. The next fall she was made principal of the intermediate opportunity school which included grades 7-10. She also completed her secondary teaching credential during this period, teaching at

adult night school to satisfy student teaching requirements. After two successful years at the intermendiate level, Rebecca was put in charge of the district alternative school, grades K-12.

Simultaneously, a conservative political backlash against desegregation had developed. Candidates were elected to the board of education on platforms supporting establishment of fundamental alternative schools. Rebecca's philosophy of education was considerably more progressive. Having started a doctoral program in Southern California which in the end did not fulfill her interests, Rebecca applied for a fellowship at a prestigious Eastern university specializing in alternative education. She was accepted and took a sabbatical to complete her studies back east. She left the school district after 11 years of successful administrative experience which had brought her nothing but praise.

For this reason she was shocked by a phone call from the superintendent the next April telling her she was being demoted to teacher because the school district had too many principals and there was no place for her. This is the same man who had served as her mentor and colleague, one who had depended on her in the past to ease tensions within the community. As she discussed her situation with her supporters in the district, she was convinced this never would have happened had she not been out of the state. Having completed her doctorate by the end of that summer, Rebecca learned that the school district was screening for new principals. Upon the advice of her attorney, she applied and finished in the top three candidates. When one of the schools with an opening

confronted the superintendent demanding that Rebecca be appointed principal of that K-3 school, his response was that "This school needs a man as principal." Rebecca was not appointed. She taught high school English in the district from September until April, when she was recruited and hired by the largest school district in the area as an alternative school principal. She has continued her career there with the highest degree of success at both the school and district level.

Rebecca decided to challenge the school district's decision to demote her and then not rehire her as a principal. Like Sheila Reynolds, Rebecca first approached the state professional administrator group for assistance, but was refused. She was told principals serve at the pleasure of the board of education. She then filed sexual discrimination charges through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commision, and after a 3 year struggle she won her case.

Having never received anything but positive evaluations as a principal, Rebecca speculated that she was the victim of local politics related to two incidents which occured shortly before she went on sabbatical. The first involved a visit by a liberal community activist to Rebecca's school. The intent of this visit, witnessed by the wife of a conservative fundamentalist board of education member, was misconstrued. The superintendent asked Rebecca to describe the event in a memo in which she indicated there had been misinformation concerning the event. However, the board member accused Rebecca of calling his wife a liar and

demanded an apology in writing. In a letter to the board member which her superintendent later refered to as a masterpiece, Rebecca referred to the incident as an unfortunate misunderstanding and suggested that she and the board member had more important jobs to do in the district.

The second incident involved remarks that Rebecca made before the board of education at a highly emotional meeting attended by over 600 people. The point of conflict was the continued funding of numerous alternative schools within the school district at the expense of the regular education program. The alternative school movement was begun at the urging of the conservative board members who opposed desegregation. Rebecca was asked by a community group to speak in opposition to such a scheme which served to drain funds from the regular program to support fundamental, back to basics magnet schools. Her remarks were greeted with a standing ovation.

Obviously neither of these two events endeared her to the conservative majority on the board of education. And because in California principals serve at the pleasure of the board, they can be removed without cause. The sexual comment made by the superintendent was a careless one. Rebecca who had always been open about her beliefs did not anticipate the power of the new conservative board members.

Conclusions Regarding Rebecca Tull

This case differs from the others in that the question of

incompetence was never raised. The superintendent initially attributed the demotion of Rebecca Tull to a reduction in force. His refusal to reappoint her to a principalship when it became available had to do with the school's needing a man for a principal, he claimed. Whether or not he believed this or was merely carrying out the wishes of the board of education was not determined.

Rebecca Tull was a confident administrator. She believed strongly in the integration of the school district and resisted efforts by conservative board of education members who were attempting to sabbatage the plan. She describes her decision to speak out publicly as the only decision she could make in order to maintain her integrity and do what was right for the children of the district. She was a risk taker, and in this situation the apparent cost was her job as a principal. But it would appear that her ability to land on her feet, as she describes it, can be attributed to what Marshall would describe as her successful socialization to a self-defined as opposed to culturally defined female administrator. She had developed a support system which came to her rescue in a time of crisis. She took charge of her situation and sought alternatives.

Comparisons

All three of these women were intelligent and well educated. Two of them had doctorates from research universities. They had logged many years of successful teaching and administrative experience

prior to serving as principals. They had taught longer than the average for men in comparable situations.

None of the women were married at the time of the interview. One had never been married. One married late in life and the marriage lasted but three years dissolving during the turmoil of her principalship. The third had been married unhappily for many years, and ended the marriage shortly after her career crisis.

All three women worked extremenly hard, putting in ten-hour days on the average.

Two of the three women had no mentors and lacked a support system within the profession. Of those two, however, one had a close personal friend who was not an educator who provided emotional support. One of the women had several mentors throughout her career and enjoyed a strong support system within the school district and the community. But all the women pointed out that the job of principal is a lonely one, and that they could have benefitted throughout their careers from organizations which provided specific support for women in administration.

All three women tended to express their opinions openly and freely on the job. All of them felt this quality or characteristic had contributed to their difficulties.

Two of the three women were among the first female principals appointed in their districts. The first was never successful at

being included by the men principals. The other felt there was a definite resentment toward her, and thatthere was a possible double standard of performance for men and women. Although not a token female in her district, the third woman felt the lack of support and reported repeated incidents of sexual harrassment and sexual inuendo couched in remarks about her promotion and success within her school district.

Two of the women experienced the involuntary reassignment in mid-career and went on to serve successfully in higher level positions in other districts. The third woman served only two more years before retiring from the position to which she was demoted. It should be noted that she truly enjoyed that position and demonstrated great expertise.

The two women who resorted to legal intervention were in mid-career and did win either full or partial concession. All three women sought and were denied assistance by their state professional organization.

Alledged incompetency was an issue for two of the three. One of the two women did not perceive the corrective feedback to be specific. The other felt it to be an exercise in paperwork, not a legitimate plan for possible improvement.

None of the three women felt they had been adequately prepared for the principalship through their administrative preparation programs. Two of them speculated that this was because they had

studied so long ago. However, one felt that much of what you need to know can only be learned on the job.

Recommendations

For those of us involved in preparation programs for school administrators, there are special lessons to be learned relative to female candidates. It is incumbent upon us to teach women about the political realities of organizations. Greater attention must be focused on theories of management, decision-making, intergroup relations, and change. Access to the socialization process is possible for women, but they first must realize its substance and importance. Most importantly, university professors must serve as real and surrogate sponsors for women as they strive to succeed as educational administrators. Further study of women and their special needs related to preparation for a career in educational administration should be emphasized.

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